

Message Text

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PAGE 01 LONDON 15737 01 OF 02 141227Z

44

ACTION SS-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 NSCE-00 CCO-00 /026 W

----- 096526

O P 141216Z OCT 75

FM AMEMBASSY LONDON

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 5531

INFO AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA PRIORITY

AMCONSUL ASMARA PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY BEIRUT PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY JIDDA PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY KHARTOUM PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY KUWAIT PRIORITY

AMEMBASSY ROME PRIORITY

USMISSION GENEVA PRIORITY

LIMITED OFFICIAL USE SECTION 01 OF 02 LONDON 15737

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PFOR, ET, US

SUBJECT: KAGNEW FOUR

REF: STATE 243274

1. BELIEVE ENGLISH JOURNALIST WHO CARRIED OUT LETTER FROM ELF HOSTAGE THOMAS BOWIDOWICZ IS "FINANCIAL TIMES" CORRESPONDENT, GWYNNE ROBERTS. FOLLOWING IS FULL TEXT OF ARTICLE BY ROBERTS WHICH APPEARED IN OCTOBER 14 ISSUE OF "FINANCIAL TIMES":

2. BEGIN QUOTE: ERITREAN GUERRILLAS INTEND TO HOLD IN-DEFINITELY THE TWO AMERICAN SERVICEMEN THEY KIDNAPPED A MONTH AGO FROM THE U.S. COMMUNICATIONS STATION AT KAGNEW, OUTSIDE ASMARA. THEY SAY THEY WILL ONLY RELEASE THEM IF THE U.S. GOVERNMENT AGREES TO REMOVE THE BASE FROM ERITREA AND TM HALT MILITARY AID TO ETHIOPIA.

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PAGE 02 LONDON 15737 01 OF 02 141227Z

3. WHEN I SPOKE TO THE GUERRILLA LEADERS INSIDE ERITREA JUST OVER A WEEK AGO THEY SAID THEY DID NOT PLAN TO EXECUTE THE HOSTAGES OR SET ANY DEADLINE FOR THEIR RELEASE. THEY WOULD HOLD THEM UNTIL WASHINGTON COMPLIED WITH THEIR DEMANDS.

4. BUT AN ELD EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETING WAS BEING CONVENED INSIDE ERITREA TO DECIDE FINALLY ON POLICY TOWARDS THE TWO CAPTIVES.

5. THE HOSTAGES WERE MOVED TO THE ELF'S BASE CAMP WITHIN A FEW MILES OF THE SUDANESE BORDER AFTER THE KIDNAPING ON SEPTEMBER 12. THEY WERE FORCED TO WALK ALL THE WAY AND WERE IN SOME DANGER FROM ETHIOPIAN AIRCRAFT, WHICH WERE BOMBING VILLAGES ON THE ROUTE.

6. THE ELF CLAIMS THAT AFTER SEIZING THE HOSTAGES, WHO WERE TECHNICIANS WORKING ON THE BASE, THEY "TOTALLY DESTROYED" THE TRANSMITTER BASE, THOUGHT TO HAVE BEEN WORTH 25 MILLION POUNDS. IT WAS PART OF THE KAGNEW COMMUNICATIONS COMPLEX ON THE OUTSKIRTS OF ASMARA EMPLOYING ABOUT 40 AMERICAN SERVICEMEN.

7. WHEN I MET THE MEN, DAVID STRICKLAND, 24, AND TOM BOWIDOWICZ, 23, THEY WERE BOTH SICK WITH DYSENTRY AND HAD LOST BETWEEN 20 AND 30 POUNDS IN WEIGHT EACH. THEY HAD NO MEDICAL SUPPLIES EXCEPT FOR 50 ANTI-MALARIA TABLETS I GAVE THEM WHEN WE FIRST MET NEAR ASMARA. MEDICAL SUPPLIES AT BASE CAMP WERE ALSO MEAGER -- THERE WERE NO ANTI-BIOTICS, FOR EXAMPLE -- THOUGH THE ELF PROMISED TO HAVE SOME BROUGHT IN.

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PAGE 01 LONDON 15737 02 OF 02 141229Z

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ACTION SS-25

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AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS PRIORITY
AMEMBASSY JIDDA PRIORITY
AMEMBASSY KHARTOUM PRIORITY
AMEMBASSY KUWAIT PRIORITY
AMEMBASSY ROME PRIORITY
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LIMITED OFFICIAL USE SECTION 02 OF 02 LONDON 15737

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8. THEY WERE BOTH SUFFERING FROM ACUTE DEPRESSION BUT SAID THAT THEY HOPED THE U.S. WOULD SECURE THEIR RELEASE. "WE JUST WANT TO GET THE HELL OUT OF HERE," SAID DAVID STRICKLAND. BOTH MEN WERE APPARENTLY BEING WELL TREATED BY THE ELF GUERRILLAS AND SPECIAL FOOD SUPPLIES ARE BEING BROUGHT IN FOR THEM FROM THE SUDAN.

9. I TALKED TO ELF REVOLUTIONARY COUNCIL MEMBER TESFAI TECLAI, WHO SAID HE HAD LITTLE HOPE THAT THE AMERICAN GOVERNMENT WOULD MAKE ANY SPEEDY CONCESSIONS TO THE ELF, BUT BOTH MEN WOULD BE HELD, HE SAID, UNTIL THEIR DEMANDS HAD BEEN MET.

10. THE ETHIOPIAN ARMED FORCES APPEAR TO HAVE BEEN GIVING THE U.S. SERVICEMEN AT KAGNEW VERY LITTLE PROTECTION. TWO OTHER AMERICAN TECHNICIANS WERE SEIZED FROM THE TRANSMITTER BASE IN JULY. TWO AMERICANS WERE KILLED BY LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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PAGE 02 LONDON 15737 02 OF 02 141229Z

A LANDMINE ON AUGUST 24 NEAR THE BASE. THE KIDNAPPERS SAID THERE WAS NO DIFFICULTY CAPTURING THE TWO AMERICANS FROM KAGNEW.

11. I WAS TOLD THAT THE TWO TECHNICIANS WERE HELD BY THE RIVAL ELF FACTION, THE POPULAR LIBERATION FORCES. THEY HAD BEEN MOVED TO THE DESERT REGION NEAR THE RED SEA IN ERITREA'S SAHIL DISTRICT. THE TWO MEN WERE SAID TO BE IN GOOD CONDITION BUT I WAS ALSO TOLD THAT THEY WERE SUSPECTED OF WORKING FOR THE CIA. IF THE ELF FIND PROOF OF THIS THEY MAY FACE EXECUTION.

12. FIGHTING IN ERITREA IN THE PAST FEW MONTHS HAS BEEN INTENSE AROUND ASMARA AND ELF GUERRILLA SQUADS ARE MAKING ALMOST NIGHTLY RAIDS INSIDE THE CITY.

13. VILLAGES AROUND THE CITY ARE EITHER DESERTED OR DESTROYED BY JET BOMBERS. BUT MILITARY ACTIVITY AROUND THE OTHER MAJOR ERITREAN CITIES IS ON A MUCH SMALLER SCALE. END QUOTE

14. EMBASSY URGENTLY SEEKING TO MEET WITH ROBERTS DIRECTLY FOR FURTHER DETAILS. WILL ADVISE.
RICHARDSON

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